

# AN INTIMATE LOOK

Text by Christopher Young, 2013

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Heritage is more than where we live or what we live in, but how and why we live that way.

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We first met standing in her driveway. I was watching a company of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos noisily tear a tree apart. Small branches and fruit fell onto the footpath and into her garden beds.

Janine<sup>1</sup> showed me through her house then retreated to the backyard. She sat beneath a lemon tree reading a book as I explored her quiet house.

The tree was planted as a housewarming gift from her parents. Now close to forty years old, it provides welcome shade not only for her but also a pair of Magpies that have claimed the backyard as their own.

She regularly feeds the birds. They waited patiently at the back door for the little pieces of meat that she specifically sets aside for them.

On my second visit we sat in her sun room, laughed about me wanting to photograph her soap collection, ate simple biscuits and talked more about birds.

I was invited to do an artist residency at the Subiaco Museum looking at older properties within the City of Subiaco in Western Australia. This residency resulted in an exhibition of 11 works from August 2013. The project then expanded to include other homes across Perth and Fremantle.

Subiaco has a distinctive working class past but has increasingly been gentrified. Covering seven square kilometres, it is home to 17,000+ residents and is now considered one of Western Australia's more prestigious councils.

Access to the Subiaco properties came through a variety of means. A call out was made looking for people who would like to participate, a few friends provided more personal leads and several properties were identified through research.

The project was quite fluid with the experience being much more intimate than I expected. I'd assumed visual chaos and discomfort but instead came across a welcoming and supportive collection of people who were remarkably open.

Any features in the buildings became secondary to the eclectic personalities I encountered. Initially guided through a

house, I was then left alone to make my images with the owners often retreating to their study or the garden.

The images look at their everyday experiences as well as the shrine-like displays I had discovered. I also recorded interviews<sup>2</sup> with various people about the importance they place on particular objects.

Positioning the first suite images in the Subiaco Museum together with a collection of objects highlighted how people might engage differently with the work. Would they look at the work as an illustration of that place due to its context?

Such a diverse group of people highlighted the impossibility of trying to show any form of *typical* household. While I am aware of that, would the audience be?

This is a significant issue for museums, especially those which are smaller. How can they best portray such diversity in a confined space?

A good example of this would be the creation of a simple display that should illustrate any small community to someone who is unfamiliar with the area.

How would you resolve such a display?

What makes the community unique and distinctive? What objects would you include? What year would you set the display in? Would it be in the 1920s, 1960s or last week?

Now colourise and populate this display. What colour would you paint the walls? What style of flooring would you install? Who would live there? Would they be the exceptional members of the community or some form of statistically resolved family? How old would your protagonists be? What would they wear?

How would you represent abstract ideas like friendliness, love or anguish?

Finally, would you explain it to your audience? If so, how would you do that to an audience who might not understand English?

*Six* shouldn't be looked at as a picture of a particular city but rather as a rendering of an experience. My brief encounters with an extraordinary group of people has been, at times, very touching and the images should in some way reflect that.

1. Names have been changed throughout for privacy reasons

2. [www.tinyurl.com/six2013](http://www.tinyurl.com/six2013)